

What We Find in the Wild

Amanda Sweeney, Park Ranger at Lassen Volcanic National Park

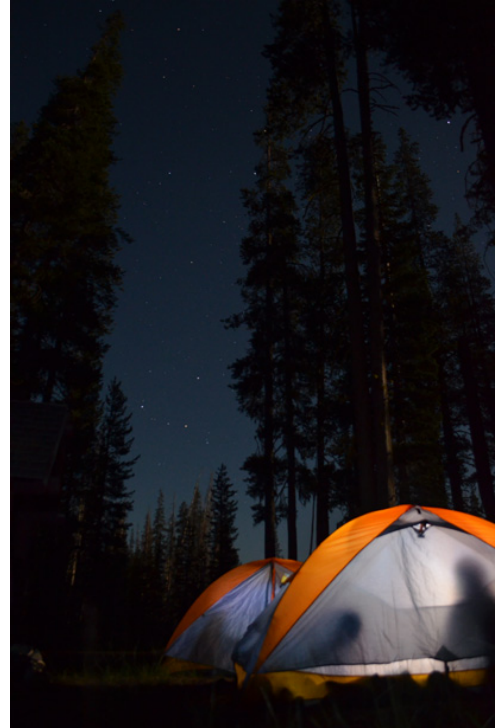


On July 11, 2014, five young women headed out on a ranger-led backpacking trip through Lassen Volcanic National Park Wilderness. Ranging in age from 14 to 16 years old, each girl submitted an application to attend the three-day backpacking trip. Four of the five girls from Red Bluff and Mineral experienced backpacking for the first time on this 15.6 mile trip.

It was raining lightly when the group headed out from the Juniper Lake trailhead, full of excitement for the adventure to come. After a short warm-up climb, we began our gradual descent to the south shore of Snag Lake. We were greeted by a wide, wildflower-filled shore and a muddy mess that we quickly escaped. We setup camp beneath pine forest adjacent to lake, enjoyed a refreshing swim, made a hearty backcountry dinner, played a few games, and told scary stories beneath the full moon before crawling into our tents.

The following day we began our greatest challenge, hiking 7.6 miles round-trip to Cinder Cone and back. We began cheerfully along the west shore of Snag Lake before climbing onto the sandy trail that would take us past the Fantastic Lava Beds, Painted Dunes, and to the base of the black cone. With encouragement from each other and volunteer, “coach” Hazel, each girl celebrated her accomplishment on Cinder Cone’s summit. Despite our best attempts to be prepared, we ran out of water on the descent and hurried back to the shore of Snag Lake to refill our water bottles and cool off in the welcoming lake. The feeling of relief was as palpable as the sense of success at overcoming a formidable challenge.

We arrived at camp late in the afternoon only to pack up and head out again, this time on a 3.1 mile climb to Horseshoe Lake. Once again, “coach” Hazel helped each young woman rally the strength inside her to make the taxing trek to our camp for the night. Wearily, we arrived at the lake with enough time to take a quick dip, fill up water bottles, and skip stones toward the setting sun. After a long day, the girls expressed that the dehydrated backpacking food somehow tasted better and began discussing what flavor of milkshake each one would enjoy at lunch in town the next day. Energized from the food and freeze dried ice cream, the girls crowded into a tent to play cards. As I sat outside to take photos, the girls giggled as they sounded out the names of constellations printed on the playing cards. I pushed the trigger on my camera to capture their glowing tent under the dark, night sky. Tears came to my eyes, as for 10 seconds I marveled at the beauty of the scenery and the blossoming love of wilderness.



This outdoor adventure was made possible with support by the Lassen Park Foundation and in partnership with the Tehama Mentoring—a program of the Tehama County Department of Education—and the Tehama Wilderness Team.